Citizenship of the Union. 4th report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Giusto CATANIA (GUE/NGL, IT) in response to the Commission's Fourth Report on EU Citizenship. MEPs pointed out that the acquisition of EU citizenship and the rights attached thereto currently depends on acquisition of the nationality of an EU Member State. Given the "very great disparities" between the rules governing access to nationality in the different Member States, the committee said it was desirable, "without questioning the Member States' powers in this area", to aim for greater coordination as regards the general criteria and procedures for the acquisition of nationality. The Member States were urged to consider establishing a closer link between permanent legal residence over a reasonable period of time and the acquisition of national - and hence European - citizenship. The report said that a system of EU citizenship based on residence should be "the ultimate goal" of the dynamic process which will make the EU a genuine political community.

The committee made a number of recommendations:

- the right of EU citizens and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States and to acquire the right of permanent residence after a five-year period in the host country should also be extended to non-EU nationals who have been resident for at least five years;

- citizens of non-EU countries who have been legally resident in an EU country for more than five years should be able to vote in local and European elections;

- the Member States should start immediate discussions on the possibility of granting EU citizens the right to vote and stand for election in municipal, local, regional and national elections in Member States in which they are resident, irrespective of nationality;

- the Member States should discuss the possibility of a European voter's card common to all the EU countries which, on the basis of each voter's nationality and principal place of residence, would indicate and detail all the elections in which voters were entitled and required to vote;

- the voting procedures used for the European Parliament elections should be standardised in order to confer a genuine European dimension on those elections and allow for the possibility of candidates being elected via transnational lists put up by European-level political parties;

- the Commission and the Member States should provide better information for EU citizens about their rights and obligations, for example via school curricula;

- the Council and Commission were urged to develop closer cooperation with the European Parliament's Petitions Committee and the European Ombudsman so that all EU citizens and residents can exercise their rights more effectively.

Lastly, the report looked at ways of ensuring a balanced EU citizenship, based on obligations as well as on rights. It suggested inter alia establishing a direct link between some aspects of the tax system and the financing of the EU budget, without increasing the overall tax burden. It added that Member States should make clear to their citizens the proportion of their taxes contributed to the EU budget.